

"PHOTO BY SALLY JORDAN"

BY

ALVIN BORETZ

Sally Jordan clamped on the hard hat given her by the construction foreman and instinctively began to tuck her lovely, dark hair inside it when she became aware that several of the men were watching her with some amusement. Instead, she shifted her loaded camera bag onto her right shoulder and stepped into the open elevator that ran along the tall skyscraper still under construction. The wooden platform creaked upward and she passed workmen on the various open floors laying wire and pipe. Down below, the people on Fifth Avenue began to diminish in size and the rivers flanking Manhattan came into view. Aware of her precarious perch, she tried to set her mind to enjoying the magnificence of the view.

In the course of her many jobs, Sally had been in a lot of unique places. Not all had been ^{as} adventurous as the ascent to this pinnacle of iron girders or the time she had gone down in a tiny submersible to shoot the eruption of a volcano far below the surface of the Pacific but the constant variety of her work turned on a current that took her through whatever the day might bring.

At the moment, she was facing a narrow catwalk laid over two exposed girders at what seemed the top of the universe. Waiting at the other end was the narrow cab from which its operator manipulated one of the world's tallest cranes. The workman who had come along as her guide yelled for her to start out but his words were lost in the wind. He motioned to her. She hesitated, gripped the rail

and took a few tenuous steps. The heavy camera bag tilted her over as the wind blew. She grabbed the rail more tightly and caught a glimpse of the street. My God, it was far! A few seconds later, the operator's hand reached out and pulled her into the cab. For an hour she shot his extraordinary skill as part of her story on "Building Castles In The Air."

That night, she developed the film. Her phone rang several times while she was in the dark room. She played back the calls on her machine as she sat at her desk and marked the shots on the contact sheets she suggested for the story. She knew her editor would probably ignore her advice. Editors were always choosing the wrong shots or cropping them badly and then screwing up the layout but that was all part of the endless war between the photo-journalists and their editors.

The calls were, in order....a request from John McEnroe's father for some pictures of his son that Sally had taken for a tennis magazine....an assignment from Simon and Schuster to take a book jacket photo of an Italian Nobel Prize winner whose works they were reprinting....a request to do a fashion show (the kind of assignment she tried to avoid unless she needed the money)...a message from Ira Miller, a reporter for Science Digest..who'd been trying to date her for a month and finally, the faint, echoing sound of a trans atlantic call. Upon hearing it, she looked up from the contact sheets and listened...listened attentively as she heard Jake Morgan's voice and then the sound of London's Big Ben as he held the phone outside the window.

For two years, Jake had been an important part of Sally's life. She had met him on a train while riding out to visit her parents who lived on Long Island's south shore. He was an old college friend of a bright young theatrical director she knew who was bringing him out to spend the weekend at the beach. In the next two days, Sally and Jake covered several years.

They went well together. In looks, temperament, ability. She was a few years older but neither paid attention to that inconsequential. The only problem that developed was the affliction that he seemed to share with many other young men of his age. An inability to commit himself to a relationship that threatened the possibility of marriage. It was true that his mother wasn't well and that he was concerned about her but that didn't deflect Sally from a final determination to break it off.

When she did, she suffered. It was so painful that she sought a little help. She managed it in only two sessions for Sally had a natural life force, a sense of adventure about what each day, each picture would bring and these emotional anti-bodies now served her well and she was able to think of Jake as a good and dear friend... but no longer a lover.

He had been transferred to London for a year by his law firm and lately he had taken to calling her late at night when he couldn't sleep. For Jake was at war with himself about Sally. He loved her, admired her, knew he would probably never meet a spirit like hers again but yet, there was always the chance. Always the possibility of something wonderful in a world he was yet to see.

By now she accepted his confessionals, listened quietly as his voice came over the international wires. At these times she felt a bittersweet moment now and then but she knew she could never go back. And yet....who really knew.

The next morning she rose early, rented a car and picked up the writer on a story she was to photograph for New York Magazine. It was an interview with an international swindler who had just been placed in an upstate prison for the next thirty five years.

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Sally Jordan is an unusual young woman. Because of her profession and because of whom she is as a person, she has a unique opportunity to explore the full range of human relationships and modern conflicts. As a successful woman, she shares with many others the search for someone with whom to share her life. Like Jake Morgan, many of the men she meets are holding on to their bachelorhood in a death grip. The married men are out for a good time and the divorced are afraid of becoming involved again, especially with a woman they think will compete with them. Of course, the minute Sally gets a sense of that's where a man is coming from, she's long gone.

So Sally juggles two lives. A rising young photo-journalist fights for equal time with a bright and loving young woman who wants to love and who wants a home and children.

The rare moments she rests...leans back with a glass of wine and the stereo playing her music...her defenses fall and the tug

of war begins. Would marriage mean the end of her freedom? To go anywhere and do anything? If she has to worry about someone else's career, how will she be able to worry about her own? Although the problem is real, it is only one side to a busy life for more and more, she has come to the acceptance of her mother's philosophy that life will take care of itself. The battle of the sexes is just part of the obstacle course she faces each day.

As a photojournalist, Sally is involved with people. Now and then she'll take a shot of a Caribbean beach at sunset or a view of the Himalayas so as to fix the memory but she would have to be carried kicking and screaming into a wedding or bar mitzvah job for that kind of picture taking is something she abhors. Now and then an editor will ask her as a personal favor to take pictures of his kids for she is known as someone who is able to catch the honest moments and sometimes she'll agree if the editor agrees to let her follow the kids around all day.

If witnesses to an event all see different things, it is no less true for photographers as the camera records what they see through the filter of their own lives. And that perhaps, is part of the reason for Sally's success. A friend wrote in the visitors book at a gallery where her pictures were on exhibition that for her, the heart was quicker than the eye. It described her well for Sally is open to human experience through the focus of what she is. A warm and deeply compassionate young woman who dissects absurdity with humor and understanding.

The excitement of her free lance work shows up in the variety

of her assignments and in those stories which she creates for herself. It was her curiosity that took her into the world of the carnival strippers where she lived for a month and into a state mental hospital where she came out with a series of pictures that brought a sweeping investigation.

A magazine assigned her to cover the murder trial of a man who had ordered his brother in law killed because he'd been unfaithful to the man's sister. It was Sally's natural instinct to become involved with the people of her photographs. She became friendly with the brother's family from his parents to his several sisters. The killer who had been hired was a young man who had never been in trouble before but who now found himself on trial along with his boss...the man who wanted to avenge his sister. Going into all their lives, Sally found herself in a byzantine tale of family intrigue and deceit brought on by superstition and an ancient tradition. It was this empathy which brought a few leads that the lawyer of the young killer was able to use in proving he had been tricked into the murder.

But melodrama is an incidental byproduct of Sally's professional life. Because of who she is and the relationships she naturally creates, both she and her pictures act as a catalyst. Her coverage of a satellite tennis tournament in North Carolina is just one of the many stories that had her involved in the lives of the people as her camera went to work.

Sally often finds herself at the major tournaments with the world's best players because she became known as the photographer

who would always be found the shooting the loser after a championship match while the other photographers would be surrounding the winner. Action shots of the matches bored her. What she was always after were the players in their human moments.

Here in Fayetteville, which included among its dubious charms, the largest imitation of the Eiffel Tower, Sally had decided to go behind the scenes of the tennis circuit and show the reality of the also rans and of those players who were trying to make it. She had chosen a satellite tournament on the women's tour and her very first day she became friendly with two older players in their thirties who traveled the circuit in a camper as they struggled to earn enough points to make a big time event. They were old for tennis players but the dream would take a long time to die.

She saw young girls with either their fathers or mothers shepherding them and fighting the officials for a better seed or a more favorable opponent. A young black girl caught her eye and she shot her loneliness and the determination of her grandfather to help the girl find her courage.

Once, in the middle of the night, one of the girls, frightened and unsure, came to Sally and poured out her heart. By the end of the tournament, Sally's friendship had helped the girl to get a new perspective on what she really wanted to do with her life.

Out of the pressures grinding away at these young women and their often unrealistic hopes, she was able to create a picture story that gave new insight to the public glamour of big time tennis. Even today, some of the girls still keep in touch with her.

Although Sally goes out on assignments and shoots movie stars, sports heros, corporation presidents and people in the news, her real excitement comes in her picture stories and books. She has done such books as STREET COPS, FIREHOUSE, CIRCUS DAYS and RESURRECTION CITY, when the poor camped on the mall in front of the Washington Monument. It is then that she is able to be a part of the very real drama and to show it through the faces of the people involved. People with whom she joins and in whose lives she takes part.

She has been to India to work with Mother Theresa and to help bring her story to the world. She has been in Guatemala where she showed the truth of people struggling to live. In New York her pictures showed the stark reality of what it takes to be a high fashion model and finally ended with a beautiful young woman who almost died from anorexia nervosa.

She is drawn to children and has done books such as "The Young Dancer" and "The Young Gymnast." She followed a young black girl from South Carolina who came to make her way in the city and did the same for a young man in his first year at med school. The whole world is open to her and she means to see and celebrate it all in her photographs.

It's difficult for her to stay outside her stories for her natural commitment and compassion won't allow it. Recently she did a book about a young high school rock group that dreamed of making a record. They liked her and soon she was their confidante.

Because of her personal involvement with both the young people and their parents, all the hard work she had put into the story was threatened by her knowledge that the band's singer was pregnant. When the girl became ill, it was a secret she was forced to violate.

It was neither the first time nor the last that she would have to make a decision as to the ethics of what she was doing. Did her work give her a license to reveal people as she chose?

Her lens has a two way focus, for many people, aware of her profession, either want to use her for their own needs or want to make sure that she doesn't use them. In some cases, it already has lead to her being in jeopardy as when the father of the man who had planned his brother in law's death, threatened to have her punished if she used his picture and indeed, he did knock her down to emphasize the warning.

Because of Sally's work, the series is capable of playing its stories in many places and in many keys. Romance, adventure, melodrama, personal relationships.....we are dealing with someone whose daily life dramatizes what it's like to be a professional woman in today's complex society. Each story works on a double level. The photo-journalist and the woman for whom the biological clock continues to tick.

Men continue to move in and out of her Sally's life. Jake Morgan is often around, like an overhanging cloud and Ira Miller, a reporter, is one of many unwelcome suitors. Byron Sullivan, a magazine editor, is a good friend who swears that Sally's

lovely face is wooing him back to the straight side of the tracks.

Women friends and acquaintances come and go with a fair regularity. Her former college room mate, Mindy Spielman, is a dancer who is always hurting her back so she is talking of becoming a physiotherapist. Sally likes Mindy as much as she dislikes Tamara Medina whom she dismisses as a paparazzi. Tamara is at every party, every opening, every event where the stars come out to shine. She is a favorite of the tabloids and the antipathy between Sally and Tamara is thinly disguised with loaded critiques of each other's work.

But since Sally's work is people, each assignment brings her in contact with new possibilities. Each day, with humor, grace and courage... Sally Jordan holds herself and her camera up to a changing and always challenging world.